Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 25 | Issue 3 Article 13

7-1-2008

Corcoran, RETHINKING HUMAN NATURE: A CHRISTIAN MATERIALIST ALTERNATIVE TO THE SOUL

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the metaphysical tradition and of a more sophisticated conception of God. For the Milesian School, nature was something alive and divine. Although in their alternative to the mythical approach to reality there are some signs of atheist naturalism, they can also be seen as those who first proposed the theistic metaphysical concept of God. The beginning of the rational tradition, far from disposing entirely with the concept of God, was strongly based on it. So, belief in God does not need to be taken as contradictory to the pursuit of scientific discovery. In many cases and for many people, including important scientists in the past and present, it can actually be a meaningful pre-condition.

In short books with ambitious aims, missing points like the ones indicated above are almost inevitable. This flaw is well counter-balanced by a provocative, enjoyable style of presenting the ideas, and a good overview of the main atheistic arguments. In a book of philosophy, an engaging tone is generally an important quality. Like all short introductions, Baggini's book runs the risk of treating its subject superficially. This is not a defect when it assumes its role of being just a starting point for the discussion of a controversial theme. The problem is that atheism is not subjected by him to any questioning in its own right, as if it were immune to numerous criticisms that have been made to it. In other words, it is doubtful whether this kind of introductory text should be designed as a sort of intellectual defence artillery for atheists (or for religious believers). A more neutral approach, dedicated to showing the pros and cons of the debate involving atheism, would be more adequate. Although it is not contrary to the alleged open-mindedness of the atheistic position defended by Baggini, the apologetic approach chosen sounds a little strange, if not naïve, and smacks a bit of advertising in many parts. Considering theoretical debate the main function of a book of philosophy (even a short one), and given the non-fundamentalist perspective adopted by the author, this work should be recommended to the religious believer as a means of fine-tuning his own beliefs in view of other perspectives, rather than as a handbook to help the atheist maintain peace of mind.

Rethinking Human Nature: A Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul, by Kevin J. Corcoran. Baker Academic, 2006. Pp. 152. $18.99 (paperback).

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Rethinking Human Nature is an effort to bring the constitution view of persons to an audience of philosophy and theology students, as well as laypeople who are eager for an intellectual workout. The constitution view, Corcoran argues, is a viable middle ground between dualism and what he calls "nothing-but" materialism, combining in one view the theses that human persons are not merely bodies and that humans are entirely material creatures. Throughout, Corcoran argues that the constitution view is consistent with essential Christian beliefs and that where it parts company with the bulk of the Christian tradition, the tradition's error can be explained and the departure can be defended. As a book that brings a

metaphysically sophisticated theory of human nature to a broad audience, it occupies a useful niche.

The book is friendly in tone and generous in its consideration of alternative views. Without oversimplifying, it concisely engages the dominant positions on the mind/body problem and argues for the constitution view. Corcoran is a model of humility. When he takes up the topic of substance dualism, for example, Corcoran goes out of his way to insist that the arguments of dualists deserve a hearing, and that dualism is in no way intellectually substandard. This even-handed spirit of charitable critique pervades the book.

Dualism is the topic of the first chapter, which discusses the substance dualism of Plato and Descartes, the compound dualism of Aquinas, and William Hasker's emergent dualism. This will be familiar territory for philosophers, and will serve as a fine overview for students. It is Aquinas's view that receives the harshest assessment. Corcoran judges it to be incoherent, despite Eleonore Stump's defense. Corcoran finds Hasker's emergent dualism to be a somewhat puzzling but nonetheless coherent view, though not one which solves problems unsolved by the constitution view. The assessment of substance dualism focuses on dubious premises of various arguments for dualism, especially Descartes's. Corcoran does not think that the usual arguments against substance dualism are compelling, so his account of these is very brief.

The second chapter is a critique of a reductionistic "nothing-but" materialism that identifies the human person either with a biological organism (animalism) or the matter that composes it. Corcoran explains the difficulties of accounting for persistence across time and explaining consciousness. The chief objection, however, rests on the intuition that persons are essentially persons, where a person is understood to be an entity capable of conscious experience. Suppose a mad surgeon were to remove your cerebral cortex, leaving a respirating, metabolizing, unthinking shell. Could such a remainder possibly be you? Corcoran is convinced that it could not. The animalist, though, is committed to this possibility, since it is apparently possible for a human organism to persist through the loss of the cerebral cortex.

The constitution view is explained in the third chapter. On this view, a piece of paper may *constitute* a dollar bill without being *identical* to it. The paper and the bill are distinct objects because they have different histories and potentialities. The paper could come to have a uniform shade of blue, say, though the bill could not. Applied to human beings, the idea is that a body constitutes a person without being a person. A body sometimes survives changes a person cannot, and, as the following chapter makes clear, the body exists before the essentially-capable-of-consciousness person comes to be. Thus the person is wholly material without being identical to a human body.

Theologically, Corcoran observes, we may want to point out that humans are essentially relational. This fits his account well, he says, since the constitution view characterizes persons as having first-person perspectives. A social and linguistic environment is causally necessary for the formation of a first-person perspective, and so relatedness is needed both for personhood and for being the particular kind of person one is. It is not clear from Corcoran's discussion why the dualist or "nothing-but"

materialist could not affirm the relatedness of human persons in just the same way, though, so his comment that the constitution view is preferable to other views overreaches.

Corcoran argues that most of the common philosophical objections to the constitution view dissolve on careful consideration. He grants that it is counterintuitive that distinct physical objects can occupy exactly the same space at the same time, but opines that the positive considerations for the view outweigh the worry. Here he also addresses objections based on the doctrine of the incarnation and the notion of the *imago dei*.

Corcoran devotes his longest chapter to stem cell research, cloning, and preimplantation genetic diagnosis, topics he sees as potential stumbling blocks for much of his intended audience. The chapter begins with an argument that neither materialism nor dualism entails or precludes an ethic of life. These metaphysical views must be supplemented with moral principles if they are to yield conclusions about the controversial issues that surround the beginning of life.

The matter concerns Corcoran since on his view an early term fetus is not and does not constitute a person. Even the human organism that will come to constitute a person does not begin to exist until thirteen days after fertilization, at an early estimate. Until that point the dividing cells of the morula and later the blastocyst are a collection rather than an individual object. One might fear that such a view implies that we have no ethical obligation to preserve these early products of fertilization.

But the constitution view has no such implication, Corcoran argues. The biblical themes of creation, incarnation, and resurrection are an enthusiastic declaration of the value of the material world, and so they provide Christians with good reason to preserve early products of fertilization even if they are not persons or human organisms. The doctrine of the incarnation in particular gives us *prima facie* reason to hold prenatal life in high regard. Corcoran draws on these biblical themes in a variety of ways, concluding that human embryos should be created only if they are intended for implantation. Hence embryos should not be created for stem cell research that will eventually destroy them, and *in vitro* fertilization can be used to create multiple embryos only if the parents are willing to implant all the embryos so created. On the other hand, non-embryonic stem cell research is permissible or even obligatory; the doctrines of incarnation and resurrection push us to seek the consummation of God's kingdom of healing and wholeness. The discussion includes a thorough and helpful introduction to the early stages of embryonic development, which Corcoran treats with a metaphysician's eye for questions of persistence and unity.

The chapter's greatest weakness is the somewhat tenuous connection between its motivating theology and its ethical conclusions. Creation, incarnation, and resurrection are centrally important themes for Christian thinking about materiality and embodiment. Corcoran's non-trivial engagement with them is laudable. But the notion that human reproduction ought to mirror the giving character of divine creation, for example, itself needs to be supplemented in order to yield the result that it is morally impermissible to create more embryos than are intended for implantation. Might not the creation of surplus embryos be a way of giving, a means

for increasing the likelihood of a successful pregnancy? If a blastocyst is not a person, why not use it to help ensure that a full-fledged person will come to be? Even if the theological arguments are only suggestive, though, Corcoran has succeeded in illustrating how a materialist with solidly Christian intuitions may be a principled defender of prenatal life.

The fifth chapter canvasses the recent philosophical discussion about resurrection. Materialists have faced the puzzle of how a resurrected person can be identical to a person who once died, given that the corpse decays and disintegrates. Corcoran says it is plausible that dualists are no better off than materialists, though, since they must account for how the resurrection body can be the same body as that which died. Many early and medieval Christians, though they were dualists, wrestled with this very problem. Indeed, Corcoran suggests, having the same body again is what makes it a resurrection as opposed to a reincarnation.

Historically, the most common solution was a reassembly view. Though he offers some promising replies to the standard objections, Corcoran ultimately rejects this view because it includes no immanent causal relation between stages of a person's life. So he explores two other possibilities: gappy existence (i.e., death followed by nonexistence and then resurrection) and non-gappy survival (via fissioning as described below). Corcoran argues that each is logically consistent with the requirement of an immanent causal relation, so that the materialist has several ways of understanding the possibility of resurrection.

The final chapter aims to show that the constitution view is consistent with the teaching of the Bible. Corcoran places a refreshing emphasis on the need for holistic interpretation of the Scriptures rather than an approach centered on a few proof texts, though he does take time to consider of number of specific passages that appear to imply or presuppose a dualistic anthropology.

Both the Old and the New Testaments, Corcoran argues, are consistent with the idea of an *embodied* existence between death and resurrection. At the moment of death the matter of the body would fission, producing both the corpse and, elsewhere, the matter that constitutes a living body, the same body that existed before death. Later the body would be glorified in the general resurrection. This accommodates an intermediate (i.e., postmortem and pre-resurrection) state of consciousness, which Corcoran believes to be taught by Scripture. The idea of intermediate embodiment is typically overlooked, Corcoran observes. John Cooper, for example, considers only three resurrection possibilities: immediate resurrection, nonexistence/re-creation, and the dualistic disembodiment/re-embodiment.

Corcoran takes Jesus' resurrection to be paradigmatic of human resurrection generally. For the intermediate embodiment view, this raises the question how Jesus could have a living, intermediate body if his body was also lying lifeless in the tomb. Corcoran sensibly replies that it was Jesus' *corpse* which occupied the tomb while his intermediate *body* was active elsewhere. However, Corcoran does not address the further question of what happened to the corpse before the discovery of the empty tomb on Easter morning. No doubt a story could be told. The corpse was stolen after all, or else it miraculously evaporated. But the latter would be an *ad hoc* appendage to a story that is already, in Corcoran's phrase, "a whopper."

It is also worth noting that on the intermediate embodiment view a "resurrection" is the glorification of an already existing and living body. In no sense is it a rising from the grave. This is ironic given Corcoran's suggestion that contemporary dualists have neglected or misunderstood the meaning of 'resurrection.'

One of the principal ideas of the chapter is that the biblical case for dualism is not as straightforward as it is sometimes assumed. That is a point well worth making. Though a dualist interpretation can be defended, the anthropological teaching of the text (if any) is not entirely explicit. But it is also true that the materialist alternatives, and the intermediate embodiment view in particular, face some serious challenges.

Overall, *Rethinking Human Nature* is an excellent entry to current Christian reflection on the relation between mind and body, as well as the surrounding ethical and theological issues. It engages the reader, succinctly covers a wide range of arguments, and exemplifies thoughtful and careful reflection from a thoroughly Christian perspective. Corcoran does not pretend that all readers will be convinced by the case for the constitution view, but he offers his audience an appealing invitation to take it seriously. For many students and non-specialists, *Rethinking Human Nature* will be the best available introduction to an important facet of contemporary thinking on mind and body.

Providence, Evil and the Openness of God, by William Hasker. Routledge, 2004. Pp. 224. $130 (hardback).

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"How does God run the world?" How can we account for "the prevalence of evil in a world supposedly governed by a God who is wise, good, and powerful?" (p. 1) In *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*, William Hasker offers a series of reflections based largely upon these questions. Each chapter of this volume is a stand-alone essay, though all are united by one central theme: the superiority of open theism over rival conceptions of divine providence with respect to both the problem of evil and the existence of libertarian free will.

This volume is divided into two parts. The five essays in Part One comprise a discussion of the problem of evil; these essays deal very little with the differences among competing accounts of divine providence, but focus instead on the beliefs shared by most traditional theists. Hasker spends almost no time on the logical problem of evil, referring the reader to Alvin Plantinga's Free-Will Defense. Instead, the focus here is on the evidential problem of evil, "the version which claims that God's existence is *improbable* given the evidence of evil." (p. 24)

Prior to the discussion of the evidential problem, however, is an essay pertaining to the *existential* problem of evil. This version of the problem is articulated in the form of *moral protest* against a God who would create a world in which suffering is prevalent. In chapter one, "On regretting the